The Politics of Closure in Don Delillo's White Noise

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Although Don Delillo's 1984 novel *White Noise* boosts no formal ending in terms of plot resolution, it manages to achieve a high sense of narrative closure.1 The novel ends with a short chapter that runs counter to the narrative demands of plot logic and reader's expectations. After a long and surrealistic chapter in which the main character Professor Jack Gladney attempt to murder the scientist Willie Mink for seducing his wife Babette and, subsequently, experiences a nightmarish series of adventures in Germantown, the novel ends with a short, epiphanic-like chapter which comprises three narrative vignettes that are in complete discontinuity with the narrative sequence of Jack's plot.

The murder chapter leaves Jack exhausted and concludes on his authorial-like tongue that: " There was nothing to do but wait for the next sunset, when the sky would ring like bronze." 2 The final chapter that follows immediately does not fulfill this prophetic promise for it starts vigorously with a new narrative that concerns the highway bike adventure of Babette's five-year old son Wilder. This narrative does not only distance itself temporally from that of the murder scene but also creates a deliberate sequential ambivalence: "This was the day Wilder got on his plastic tricycle, …" (p.322). While this rhetorical initio mimics the openings of the classic folkloric adventure tales it breaks down the line of linear narrative progression Jack's narrative tries to create throughout the text. The reader can never be sure whether this happened after or before the murder narrative.

The same textual tactics are employed with the second narrative vignettes in the final chapter. The intensity of Wilder's adventure which arouses in the reader a high sense of fear and expectations after the manner of classical tragedy suddenly give way to the tranquility of the sunset scene: "We go to the overpass all the time. Babette, Wilder and I." (p.324). The absence of transitional and cohesional markers between these two narratives shakes further the reader's sense of plot progression. Self and community intrude to disrupt this sense of tranquility that nature provides momentarily: "Men in Mylex suits are still in the area" (p.325) undermines the both the narrator's sense of momentary security and mind peace and that of the reader by positing cultural apotheosis as the other of narrativity. Irony predominates in such moments of narrative apartheid as the ultimate mode of self resistance: " Dr. Chakravarty is eager to see how my death is progressing." (p.325). Community lost its healing powers as the individual melts into subjectivity and alienation. The

narrator recoils into self, as a result, and shuts his ego from the pain of communal existence: " I am taking no calls" (p.325). This simply ushers the narrator's complete separation from the symbolic order of language and the atrophy of communal identity.

The text suddenly breaks as a new narrative vignette intrudes. The authorial will to silence dissolves into the formal space of the supermarket: "The supermarket shelves have been rearranged." (p.325). Everyone is lost and a confusion ensues as people miss their daily routine at the level of cultural habituation which is consumerism. The narrator is elated and experience a spiritual revelation. This transcendence seems to establishes the narrator's faith in consumerism as symbolized by the supermarket. Once again the narrative distances itself temporally in such a way as to create sequential ambivalence: "It happened one day without warning" (p.325). Such effect of temporal distancing is, undoubtedly, meant to create a semblance of narrative independence. This vignette is self-contained as it maintains its own paradigm of signification. Its figuration of meaning and thematization of world-views operate independently as a mini text that is situated within a web of intertexuality.

Apart from the single incident of Jack's refusal to take calls from his doctor which operates as a sequential consequence of the murder narrative, the final chapter fails to behave as an ending to Gladney's narrative. It fails to bring that narrative to a point of actational saturation necessary for its resolution. Closure as such never happens at the end of *White Noise* at least from the perspective of the textual paradigm of classic narrative poetics. The final chapter of the novel is more or less a narrative coda that is designed to cap the main narrative line of the Gladneys. The critic David Cowart makes an accidental reference to this possibility in his pioneering study *Don Delillo: The Physics of Language* when he states at the end of his discussion of *White Noise* that : "Like a great symphony, Don Delillo's novel ends with a triple coda." 3 Cowart does not make any further explanation beyond this statement but he seems to have in mind the two characteristics of the musical coda which are the concluding function and the structural independence. The significance of such a reading goes beyond simple comparisons. It seeks to displace the concept of formal ending as narrative resolution with a thoroughly internalized and thematically functional concept of closure as resolution.

While the critical reception of *White Noise* agrees that the novel lacks a formal ending some of its astute advocators are too conservative to admit this lack . Marion Muirhead, for instance, theorizes that " the final chapter of *White Noise* contains two endings, the traditional American sunset, followed by the real of final ending, a scene from the supermarket, which may actually be a new beginning." 4 Such a reading is necessarily minimalist as it seeks to simplify things at the risk of affective fallacy. Muirhead seems to overlook the fact that formal endings in classic

structuralist poetics is the ultimate point of narrative momentum. No such momentum attends the final chapter of *White Noise* as it never brings the narrative of Jack in chapter 39 to an ultimate point of actational and thematic saturation. The reader never knows what happens after the return of Gladney wounded in a blood stained car of his neighbor after his failed murder of Willie Mink. Chapter forty brings this narrative line to a disruption that distorts plot structure.

However, Muirhead's categorization of *White Noise* as a novel with double ending is sound enough in terms of internal textual logic in spite of its misplaced assumptions. The sunset scene in the last chapter can be considered a formal ending to Jack's narrative in chapter 39. This scene maintains strong connections with Jack's concluding sentence in chapter thirty-nine: " There was nothing to do but wait for the next sunset, when the sky would ring like bronze." (p.321) The sunset sightseeing narrative vignette in chapter forty reproduces the apocalyptic tone of this concluding sentence. The narrative voice frames the sightseeing as "waiting" in "awe" in front of the "atmospheric weirdness" of the sunsets because of the toxic airborne event. The sunset is unnaturally bronze-like because of the residue of the toxic event. Death hinges in the atmosphere giving it a mystical sense of wonder and fear at the same time. People, along with Jack and family, watch in awe but the habituation of the scene and the act of watching render the whole matter an ordinary everyday routine. Yet the highly charged language used to describe the "secular response" of Jack and other watchers, rather than the scene of the sunset itself, tends to furnish the narrative with strong apocalyptic overtones of doom and annihilation.

But this tonic connection is not a sufficient link between this scene and the concluding sentence of chapter thirty-nine because the lack of temporal orientation renders closure impossible. The narrator never specifies dates beyond "sunsets" and "all the time." Consequently, the whole sunset sightseeing narrative becomes a communal ritual rather than a sequential episodic narrative. The murder narrative happens once but the sunsets are always being watched by the Gladneys and the community in such a way that nullifies any sense of a specific temporal perspective.

Other critics, however, sought to establish such a connection on a more hermeneutic ground. Reeve and Kerridge, for instance, believe that the narrative episodes that make up chapter forty all adumbrate in Jack's unsuccessful murder plot in chapter thirty-nine:" In the closing chapter of the novel, the narrative momentum generated by Jack's unsuccessful plot against his panic gives way to a series of interchangeable sequences." 5 Thus, by reading this plot as one against Jack's own panic of death, Reeve and Kerridge manage to present the narrative episodes of the last chapter as textual spaces of belated psychic reactions. They become small panics which carry within them their own resolution:

> It is as if once death has both implanted itself in consciousness, and defied the best efforts of language to secure it, existence is free to revert to its former guise, as a succession of self-contained, minor, temporary panics, each with its 'whirling miscellany' of vivid textures and connections,' and each more or less rapidly assuaged. 6

Panic inscribes itself in the narrative threads of the final chapter as the ultimate force in the world of *White Noise*. This turns these narrative threads into textual manifestations of the phenomenology of death in the novel: "The anxiety for control which had driven Jack on, towards knowledge and murder, or towards hosting his Hitler conference, is set in these last episodes against various forms of reaction." 7

Such a reading, However, extends the sense of action and reaction that leads to these narrative vignettes to thematize contesting forms of panic. In each of the narrative threads in the final chapter panic is extended from the 'personal' into the 'communal' and then contested towards resolution.

Wilder's tricycle adventure across the highway, the sunsets watching and the rearranged shelves of the supermarket evoke different forms of 'communal' panic which are ultimately contested to disrupt the very cultural grounds of this panic as a form of mass hysteria. This hysteria is fashioned and encountered through a narracistic recoil into selfhood. Closure, as such, becomes more cathartic than a point of narrative or textual completion. Jack's failure to resolve or, at least, face his chronic panic of death resolve itself in the therapeutic power of communal healing. Indeed, Jack can never face his panic unless he integrates himself in the dynamics of the communal hysteria. He is not that passive and detached observer in the narrative of the final chapter as the epiphanic-like narration might suggest. He shares the panicked response of the community towards what they witness or experience in each of the narrative vignettes.

The subsequent resolution of this mass hysteria into catharsis helps bring closure through the grading of this cathartic resolution of panic throughout the three threads. In each of these vignettes Jack experiences a revelation that brings his world-view to a crucial reorientation. This starts with his fascination with Wilder's defiance of death on the highway. It progress further in his resignation to his doom after the toxic event, directly after the sunset scene when he refuses to take calls from the doctor responsible for his fatal radiation case. He actually comes to accept his world with all its apocalyptic atrophies. Death, after this enlightenment, becomes a curious mixture of beauty and terror. In the sunset watching scene it adds beauty to the apocalyptic terror of the toxic residual in the sunset. Fascination and the ultimate revelation culminate in the supermarket scene which crystallize in self-recovery. Jack renews his faith in the existential codes of

his world. The new identity that commodity culture confers on him is the ultimate point in the novel's politics of closure as it involves both completion and catharsis.

The critic Stephanie S. Halldorson uncovers the same politics of closure in the final chapter of *White Noise* but with important differences. First, she characterizes the ending of the novel as "triptych" which means that a politics of plurality is highlighted to achieve closure. 8 Delillo abandons the classic narrative closure of resolution and ending in favour of a more postmodernist politics of closure which manipulates a multiplicity of textual spaces that "taunts the reader and the consumer" by virtue of its indecidibilty. 9

This sense of indecidibilty results from the fact that the "images" that Delillo uses to construct this ending "hint but do not assert; they seem unfinished without a narrative, and remain, essentially, unnarrated, unexplained." 10 Halldorson uses the word 'image' to epitomize the ungraspable, ambivalent nature of the three narrative vignettes that make up the final chapter of *White Noise*. Indeed, Delillo uses narrative to build up metaphors whose connection to the main narrative of *White Noise* remain ambivalent. This is not the traditional narrative fragmentation characteristic of the modernist literary discourse as much an epistemic failure to signify within the paradigm of textuality. Delillo's 'images' fail to materialize into 'narratives' in the concluding chapter is symptomatic of the failure of 'representation' to materialize as textuality throughout the entire novel. It is in this respect that the 'triptychs ending' can be said to share a common ground with the main narrative bulk of the novel. Halldorson arrives at this conclusion rather belatedly when she states that:

> The final chapter's triptych of scenes(reminiscent of the triptychs of consumer jargon that echoed throughout the novel) suggests a miniaturized version of jack's heroic journey through the novel. 11

Although Jack's journey is not that heroic, Halldorson insight remains intact. Jack is more an antihero caught in the logos of his decentered narrative. The anxieties of the authorial voice to adapt to the "pain of self-consciousness" in the final chapter are undoubtedly parodic in nature. 12 Each of the narrative episodes in the final chapter is designed as an epiphany where the authorial presence is geared towards utter self-consciousness. Such an epiphanic structure is essentially parodic in nature as it echoes the string of epiphanies that makes up Jack's encounter with Mink in chapter thirty-nine. This is particularly relevant to Wilder's death-defying tricycle trip across the highway which ends in "a baptism into a new realm of awareness similar to Jack's awakening after his own wound in the previous chapter." 13 What is being parodic here is definitely Jack's epiphany early

in his encounter with Mink. Both epiphanies have similar linguistic structures and narrative bent:

> I have continued to advance in consciousness. Things glowed, a secret life rising out of them…. I knew for the first time what rain really was. I knew what wet was…. I knew who I was in the network of meanings…. I saw beyond words…. I tried to see myself from Mink's view point. (p.310)

Not only perceiving the nature of pain and death as the essential ingredients of humanity was Jack able to achieve through this encounter but also the very human instinct to socialize and be part of a community. The last sentence above suggest strongly that Jack has learnt to transcend the closure form of individuality into the openness of the community and the communal self. Hence, the next two epiphanies in the last chapter hinge on the Jack in the guise of his newly acquired communal self. The sunset watching scene and the supermarket scene further enhance the parodic nature of Jack's epiphanies in the final chapter. They show Jack caught in the duality of the self as individualized and communal. While Jack is fully rejoicing in the communal rituals of sunset watching and consumer ethos, he is not yet completely liberated of the narcissim of narrow individualism. Jack's sharing the community perspective of the intensified sunsets betrays a note of doubt and apocalypse. The sunset, according to Marion Muirhead, traditionally "stands as an emblem of American romance." 14 Although Jack shares in this view, the intensified spectacle of the sunset "signifies for him a poignant loss, the loss of a world view of wholesome beauty taken at face value." 15

However, it is in the final epiphany in the closing chapter that Jack is fully integrated in the community. The choice of the supermarket is significant for Jack's ultimate transcendence. It is the trope of existence throughout the novel. 16 Indeed, the supermarket scene in the closing chapter is mystically charged as a sacred space for personal transcendence.

The supermarket is the place where the "White Noise" of the novel's title makes its most significant appearance. "And over it all," Jack narrates as he stands in the shopping aisle listening to the supermarket's ambient noise, "or under it all, a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension." (p.36) This is an almost mystical observation by a highly attuned consciousness, reminiscent of a mystic on the brink of spiritual discovery. Murray, Jacks young colleague and the novel's spokesman of postmodernist ideas, makes the comparison explicit. "This place recharges us spiritually," (p.37) he says about the function of the supermarket.

Indeed, he supermarket is the novel's cathedral where Jack finds himself surrounded by incantations as in the enchanting repetition of the commercial phrase "Kleenex Softique" (p.39), customs as in Jack's observation of the ceremonial behavior of the customers in the supermarket: "People wrote checks, tall boys bagged the merchandise … the slowly moving line edged toward the last purchase point"(p.40), and its own form of asceticism which Jack senses in the "new austerity" of generic foods. It is not church, exactly, but as Murray says, "the difference is less marked than you think." (p.38)The same is true to a lesser extent for the Mid-Village Mall, where Jack shops with reckless abandon and feels "an endless well-being." (p.84) When he leaves the supermarket with two shopping carts he feels that he had achieved "a fullness of being." (p.84)

The supermarket is actually the agency where individuals such as Jack can be liberated from the dread of death through the power of consumption. Earlier in the novel Murray spells the mystical power of death transcendence of the supermarket in his reflections on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*:

> Tibetans believe there is a transitional state between death and rebirth. Death is a waiting period, basically. Soon a fresh womb will receive the soul. In the meantime the soul restores to itself some of the divinity lost at birth…. That's what I think of whenever I come in here [supermarket]. This place recharges us spiritually, it prepares us, it's a gateway or pathway. Look how bright. It's full of psychic data. (p.37)

Throughout White Noise, Jack's ability to buy highly advertised marketed images is directly related to his psychological need to belong. Such a marketing system is based upon the illusion that belonging to this cultural advertising scheme is a guaranteed method for staving off death. Murray reminds of this when he states that "here we don't die, we shop" (p.38). Jack acts accordingly when he feels disconnected and alone as he confronts the cultural dumping ground known as the mall:

> I shopped for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it…I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgot existed. Brightness settled around me. We crossed from furniture to men's wear, walking through cosmetics. Our images appeared on mirrored columns, in glassware and chrome, on TV monitors is security rooms. I traded money for goods. I was bigger than these sums. (84)

Jack is overwhelmed by the marketing images that barrage him at the mall. He shops out of his desire or need to cultivate a sense of belonging. The products he buys have no practical function beyond their ability to make him feel somehow included in the vast cultural system around him. Part of Delillo's strategy to achieve this sense is through the representation of the mall as a literal palace ("mirrored columns," etc.) designed intentionally and specifically to seduce the consumer. The consumer culture offers the illusion that life exists not in individuality, but rather in constructing an identity based on one's ability to engage the consumer culture. Such an engagement involves spending money and buying empty products with powerful images.17

Consequently, Jack's involvement in the communal panic caused by the rearrangement of the grocery items on the shelves of the supermarket in the closing chapter of White Noise is really a participation in the rituals and spells collected in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* – 'a guide to dying and being reborn." (p.73) Furthermore, packages and products displayed in the supermarket are the "psychic data" which fulfill Jack's spiritual yearning. Commodities fill the psychological emptiness created by the overwhelming death obsession. He is no longer afraid of death because packages and containers can satisfy his spiritual craving to be reborn. 18

Thus, instead of dealing with the issues of mortality as universal connection among all people, Delillo provides a thorough investigation of the late twentieth-century cultural and psychological mechanisms that attempt to fashion and obscure the relationship between the self and death. Capitalism, he asserts, has fostered a material culture of consummation which simultaneously confirms and allows us to temporarily escape knowledge of our mortality. "We've agreed to be part of a collective perception...To become a crowd is to keep out death. To break of from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone." (p.73)

Moreover, the final supermarket scene introduces two important existential metaphors as objective correlatives for this transcendence of death via commodification of selfhood. Delillo invokes the powers of technology and the tabloids as the agency of Jack's rebirth. Technology restores the shoppers to their existential serenity:

> But in the end it doesn't matter what they see or think they see. The terminals are equipped with holographic scanners, which decode the binary secret of every item, infallibly. This is the language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living. And this is where we wait together, regardless of age , our carts stocked with brightly colored goods. (p.326)

If the supermarket is the "pathway" for Jack's transcendence of death obsession, technology, as symbolized by the "holographic scanners," is the agency of this pathway. It is the agency for the rebirth of the dead: "the language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living." The critic Peter Boxall suggests that " the introduction of the bar code turns consumers themselves into products, shuffling automata whose choices and 'lifestyles' are determined by the demands of the supermarket, rather than vice versa." 19 This is not dehumanization as much as embracing technology as a way of salvation from twisted existence and death obsession. The absence of religion or tradition in the world of White Noise is being compensated by the values of technology and consumerism. This clearly reflected in the strong note of fascination and mysticism in Jack's description of the magical powers of the "holographic scanners." Delillo confers divinity on them as they are capable of decoding the binary secret of life itself.

Jack's acceptance of the divinity of technology in his world reflects yet another crucial change in his perception of himself and his reality. In the paragraph immediately preceding the supermarket episode in the final chapter Jack stops taking telephone calls from his doctor. He explains his decision to be resulting from his phobia of technology : "He wants to insert me once in the imaging block, where charged particles collide, high winds blow. But I am afraid of the imaging block. Afraid of its magnetic fields, its computerized nuclear pulse. Afraid of what it knows about me. (p.325) His fear comes from his status as an individual. But once he is a member of the community he yields to the divine powers of technology which can decode the binary secret of life itself. The critic Bradley Butterfield validates this conclusion in his article "Baudrillard's Primitivism and White Noise." Butterfield suggests that at the end of *White Noise* Jack seems to come to locate hope in technology :"A seemingly benign technology whispers promises of eternity and salvation- we sense that if we trust in the system it will preserve us, that even dying is sanctioned as part of its perpetual productivity, that machines are in control and will take care of us even in the afterlife." 20 Hence, the divine powers of technology in Jack's world.

Delillo, however, extends this sense of divinity yet to another important tool of the consumer culture. This is the tabloid.21 The last few sentences in the novels are really a lyrical reflection on the nature and cultural stature of the supermarket tabloids and their agentive role in Jack's transcendence of death:

> A slowly moving line, satisfying, giving us time to glance at the tabloids in the racks. Everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and the extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancers, the remedies for obesity. The cult of the famous and the dead. (p.326)

If Jack is the sum total of what he has bought and his life is measured by what is there in his existential cart in the supermarket, the tabloids provide him with the make-believe necessary to maintain his cultural rebirth as a consumer. Delillo himself makes clear the significance of the tabloids in *Whit Noise*: " Perhaps the supermarket tabloids are the richest material of all, closest to the spirit of the book [*White Noise*]. They ask profoundly important questions about death, the afterlife, God, worlds and space." 22 Indeed, the reference to the supermarket tabloids at the end of the novel brings Jack's pattern of existence and rebirth a full circle. They satisfy Jack's need for faith necessary for completing his cycle of existence for they provide anything we need other than "food or love." They are textual spaces where death is being negotiated and fashioned as the fantastic. The critic Mark Osteen speaks to this effect when he states that " the postmodern prophecies repackage death and turn it into magic… for tabloids are the textual equivalent to such postmodern religions." 23

The tabloids are the sacred texts of *White Noise*, the hopeful narratives that reverse or negate death. Babette narrates a tabloid story at the family's Boy Scout refuge during the Airborne Toxic Event called "Life After Death Guaranteed with Bonus Coupons." This is a tale of death defiance through reincarnation and coupon redemption. It acquires an urgency at that moment and offers an unironic hope. Her tone, according to Jack, betrayed no sign of skepticism or condescension, and the audience that grows around her, of frightened evacuees in need of reassurance, listens with a deadly seriousness.

She reads these stories not out of curiosity, as celebrity magazines are normally read, but as possible dispatches from the beyond of promises made to a desperate and secular audience. These are essentially promises of things similar to that the Bible once promised believers: eternal life, harmonized life, digestible life, a tidy narrative that renders death meaningless. Both Jack and Babette express a willingness to believe in such seductive alternative out of desperation:

Babette picked up a tabloid someone had left on the table.

"Mouse cries have been measured at forty thousand cycles per second. Surgeons use high-frequency tapes of mouse cries to destroy tumors in the human body. Do you believe that?"

"Yes."

"So do I." (p.236)

The tabloids have replaced religion to answer their primal need for immortality, higher forms of intelligence, and defenses against death.

The critic Mark Conroy finds the tabloids the only discursive form remaining in Jack's world which embodies the spiritual essence of his commodity world. "Through its liturgy," says Conroy, "the customer may participate in the American celebrity cult while also consuming American products. Her the profane consumer items in one's cart mingle with the viaticum promised by the sacred image and text of the tabloids." 24 It is the tabloids that make the supermarket the point of intersection between profane consumption and sacred celebrity. If the supermarket provides the needs of the body, the tabloids cater for its spiritual needs. To the consumer, these tabloids are sort of devotional tracts. So Jack, like other consumers, and in spite of his protective irony , cannot but recourse to look to the tabloids for support in the light of the failure of his other narratives.

This, consequently, correlates closure with spiritual rebirth rather than with Jack's transcendence of his death obsessions. This transcendence is indeed but one stage in this rebirth. The scene of Wilder's tricycle adventure across the highway initiates this transcendence. The sunset watching scene brings the transcending subject into the rhetoric of communal selfhood. The supermarket scene affects the rebirth of Jack through the commodification of his newly fashioned communal self.

White Noise begins and ends with a ritual. The first is the cavalcade of station wagons arriving for the new school year, which Jack describes as a spectacle which he has not missed in 21 years. It ends with the communal ritual of selfhood transcendence. Jack can only get rid of his dread of death by embracing a collective consumer identity of the post-capitalist society. In his book *Reading the Popular*, John Fiske claims that consumption is like the rites of passages of religion. He believes that consumption functions like the metaphor of religion in the pre-industrial societies:

> The metaphor of consumption as religion, in which commodities become the icons of worship and the rituals of exchanging money for goods become a secular equivalent of holy communion, is simply too glib to be helpful, and too attractive to those whose intentions, whether they be moral or political, are to expose the evils and limitations of bourgeois materialism. 25

Consumption, according to Fiske, reproduces the significant features of the ritual practices, traditionally associated with religion. Consumerism, however, is a twofold ritual. On the one hand, it is a ritual of initiation into the post-capitalist society. It is a cultural agency which fashions the individual into a consumer by surrendering his/her individual identity to embrace a collective communal identity,

which the only signifying practice of subjectivity in the post-industrial society. Consumerism, on the other hand, is ritual of transcendence through which the individual go beyond the restrictions of his physical existence. Consuming experience is, in a sense, an illumination, or liberation from the bondage of physical world. Hence, the significance of Murray's remark to Babette in the supermarket: "here we don't die, we shop." (p.38). Shopping, in other words, becomes a mystical experience whereby the individual transcends his existential fears and anxieties towards illumination.

This transcendence is really a process of self-fashioning which enables Jack to interpllate the social as a surrogate of his wounded psyche in the face of utter annihilation and death. Delillo explains in an interview the ritualistic nature of the transcendental experience he was fashioning in this novel: “In White Noise, in particular, I tried to find a kind of radiance in dailiness. Sometimes this radiance can be almost frightening. Other times it can be almost holy or sacred. Is it really there? Well, yes.” 26 The turning of the shared experience of supermarkets and other aspects of suburban existence into "radiance" is but one variety of the spiritual transcendence of common experience that is capable of through the agency of the postmodern sublime.

But does such transcendence affect a sense of narrative closure to White Noise? Narrative closure, according to Noel Carroll, " is identified as the phenomenological feeling of finality that is generated when all the questions saliently posed by the narrative are answered." 27 The notion of closure refers to the sense of finality with which a narrative concludes. It is the impression that exactly the point where the text does end is just the right point. "Closure," says Carroll, "is a matter of concluding rather than merely stopping or ceasing or coming to a halt or crashing." 28 When a writer effects closure, then the reader/recipient feels that there is nothing remaining for his/her to do. There is nothing left to be done that hasn’t already been discharged. Closure yields a feeling of completeness. When the storyteller closes her/her book, there is nothing left to say, nor has anything that needed to be said been left unsaid. Or, at least, that is the intuition that takes hold of the reader.

Narratologically speaking, the closing sequence of Jack's transcendence does not affect a sense of closure on the structural level of plot development. Such an ending does not explain what happens to Jack after the failed murder plot, nor what happens to his family which has come to shrink to three members in the closing chapter of the novel. It, actually, leaves many unanswered questions and loose ends. Plot completion is unattainable with such a closing fragmented chapter. The

novel might well do end with chapter thirty-nine which brings Jack to experience death first-hand and be illuminated with it. The last sentence in this chapter even provides strong sense of closure: " There was nothing to do but wait for the next sunset, when the sky would ring like bronze." (p.321) Chapter forty seems even irrelevant to the rest of the novel in the light of this sentence. It never carries Jack narrative any further in terms of plot development and chronological extension.

However, the actual significance of chapter forty is only evident on the thematic level. It brings the three major thematic strands that run throughout the novel. These are death, sunset, and the supermarket. They are the phases of jack's rebirth. He overcomes his death obsessions, goes through the cycle of sunsets, and experiences spiritual illumination and rebirth in the supermarket. The outcome is a moment of peace that precedes death. After all Jack is dying because of his exposure to the airborne toxic chemicals. It is this moment of peace that constitutes the real substance of the novel's narrative closure. It has to do with the reader than with the character of Jack or the novel's plot completion. Jack's moment of peace, however temporary or short, is also a moment of catharsis for the reader. *White Noise* is Jack's existential tragedy in a world of simulations and appearances. His journey is indeed tragic as he goes through a variety of painful experiences and doomed to tragic death. Indeed, Jack's sense of the tragic elevates his petty existence in a world of atrophied existence. His fatal flaw is his obsession with death that leads him to assume a false identity and a career as a Hitler studies professor. The presence of Hitler in his life and his exposure in the toxic event serve to heighten the tragic sense of his life. Hence, the significance of the attained moment of peace in the last chapter for Jack and the readers of the novel alike.

With this new dimension of Jack's experience at the end of White Noise, the novel's sense of narrative closure becomes inclusive of peace and the therapeutic effect. And these are, indeed, the two primal meanings of closure. In his *A New Handbook of Literary Terms*, David Mikics explains these two root meanings of closure as follows:

> In current therapeutic language, closure has become the latter-day substitute for what the Bible refers to as peace, or rest. The association between stopping and resting goes back almost to the beginning. The Hebrew verb sbt means to stop: as when God stops creating on the seventh day. This word leads to the noun shabbat, the day of rest, of looking at creation as something that has been concluded. There is a key difference between the therapeutic and the religious ways of looking toward a satisfying ending. In our personal lives, we are told, we ought to

> "achieve," or make, closure (in order to "move on" to a good new opening). The old-fashioned alternative to this brisk self-treatment was receiving rest: waiting for it to descend on us, as the matter is expressed in the majestic sonorities of scripture. 29

White Noise's sense of closure resides somewhere between the current therapeutic usage and the old biblical peace. In order to achieve peace of the soul Jack has to surrender to the collective power of consumerism in the light of the absence of the traditional spiritual values. This is an act of willing self-treatment with therapeutic effects. Yet, it implies a further surrendering of free will and individual identity as a condition to secure self-treatment. However paradoxical this might appear, Jack finding peace in accepting his world is not only a way to cope with his existential fears and anxieties but it brings him to experience the real world as opposed to the simulated reality which is being imposed on him via the TV. and the media throughout the novel. Hence, the tone of fascination, rather than resignation, in his primal contact with this world of reality in the closing chapter.

Notes

1. In his *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms*, Edward Quinn offers the following elucidation of closure: "The ending or point of resolution in a literary work. The term becomes problematic in connection with many modern and contemporary works that are distinguished by their open-endedness or apparent lack of closure. Such works seem to ask the reader or viewer to complete them. Closure in this context refers not so much to the technical ending of a story as to a sense of completeness or wholeness experienced by the reader." (New York: Facts On File, Inc. , 2006), p.82.

2. Don Delillo, *White Noise* (London: Picador, 2002), p.321. Subsequent references to White Noise made in this paper are to this edition and are going to be cited inside the paper.

3. David Cowart, *Don Delillo: The Physics of Language* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), p.89.

4. Marion Muirhead, "Deft Acceleration: The Occult Geometry of Time in *White Noise*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 42.4 (Summer 2001): 412.

5. N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, Postmodernism and Delillo's *White Noise*," in *Don Delillo*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003), p.142.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Stephanie S Halldorson, *The Hero in Contemporary American Fiction: The Works of Saul Bellow and Don Delillo* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.142.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Laura Barrett, "'How the Dead Speak to the Living': Intertextuality and the Postmodern Sublime in *White Noise*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.2 (Winter 2002): 108.

13. Ibid.

14. Muirhead, p.411.

15. Ibid.

16. Karen Weekes, "Consuming and Dying : Meaning and the Marketplace in Don Delillo's *White Noise*," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 18 (2007): 299.

17. Guy Debord, *The Society of Spectacle* (New York: The MIT Press, 1994), p.26.

18. Mark Osteen, *American Magic and Dread: Don Delillo's Dialogue with Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p.161.

19. Peter Boxall, *Don Delillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.117.

20. Bradley Butterfield, "Baudrillard's Primitivism and White Noise: The Only Avant-Garde We've Got," *Undercurrent: An Outline Journal for the Analysis of the Present* 7 (Spring 1999): (darkwing.uoregon.edu/undercurrent/uc7/7-brad.html). 27 June 2009.

21. The online Wikipedia defines supermarket tabloids as "large, national versions tabloids, usually published weekly. They are named for their prominent placement along the checkout lines of supermarkets. Supermarket tabloids are particularly notorious for the over-the-top sensationalizing of stories, the facts of which can often be called into question. These tabloids - such as The Globe and The National Enquirer - often use aggressive and usually mean-spirited tactics to sell their issues. Unlike regular tabloid-format newspapers, supermarket tabloids are distributed through the magazine distribution channel, similarly to other weekly magazines and mass-market paperback books. Leading examples include The National Enquirer, Star, Weekly World News (now defunct), and Sun. The oldest supermarket tabloid known to date was the American "Daily News" in 1919;[citation needed] if it didn't have news to publish, it would simply make up a story, have the newspaper staff stage a photograph, then use an editing technique called the composograph to combine the fake image with a real one." (http//www.wikipedia.com) 3 March 2009.

22. Quoted in Michael Hardin, " Postmodernism's Desire for Simulated Death: Andy Warhol's *Car Crashes*, J. G. Ballard's *Crash*, And Don Delillo's *White Noise*," *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 13 (2002): 42.

23. Osteen, p.171.

24. Mark Conroy, "From Tombstone to Tabloid: Authority Figured in *White Noise," Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 35:2 (1994):109.

25. John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (London:Routledge,1994), p.13.

26. Anthony DeCurtis, "'An Outsider in This Society': An Interview with Don Delillo," in *Introducing Don Delillo*, ed. Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p.63.

27. Noel Carroll, "Narrative Closure," *Philosophical studies*, 135 (2007):1.

28. Ibid. , p.2.

29. David Mikics, *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.61-62.

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